Institute for the Documentation of Human Rights Violations against Religious Minorities in the Levant

WHERE SILENCE ENDS AND JUSTICE BEGINS

Executive Summary of Available Evidence on the Suwayda Massacres from July 13 through September 17, 2025

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Introduction and Context

This executive summary relies on verified documentation files of grave violations committed against Drue and Christians in the Suwayda Governorate of the Syrian Arab Republic during July 2025. The reported incidents stem from a coordinated campaign involving General Security forces operating under the Syrian Ministry of Defense. These military operations were marked by military incursion, systematic house-to-house raids, summary executions, and prolonged sieges of civilian areas.

The victims—predominantly civilians of the Druze and Christian communities—were subjected mass killings, physical torture, and severe psychological trauma as well as to the destruction of homes, property, critical infrastructure, and religious sites. The documentation of eyewitness accounts and corroborated visual evidence collected and reviewed by documentation teams and assembled in a vast database indicate that these actions were no isolated incidents, but part of a larger strategy of repression and intimidation targeting vulnerable religious minorities that indicate similar patterns as documented with regards to the persecutions of Alawites in the coastal areas since March 2025.

The campaign involved joint operations between State forces and non-state armed groups, including tribal militias and jihadist factions, targeted assaults on Druze neighborhoods, resulting in mass casualties, destruction of property, and forced displacement, the use of military-grade weaponry in civilian areas, with no discernible military necessity, documented acts of persecution, including religious slurs, desecration of sacred sites, and threats of extermination.

The Context: Coordinated Incitement of Sectarian Violence in Suwayda

According to local accounts, a violent assault was carried out by armed Bedouin fighters against a Druze merchant on the outskirts of Suwayda province in southern Syria who was abducted in early July 2025. This incident retaliation and triggered a series of armed clashes between Druze community members and Bedouin factions, rapidly escalating tensions in a region already marked by sectarian fragility and historical marginalization.

On 13 July 2025, the interim Syrian government, under the leadership of Ahmad al-Sharaa, then announced the deployment of State security forces to the province with the stated aim of "de-escalating" the violence. However, instead of acting as neutral peacekeepers to protect civilians, these military forces—including units from the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Defense—aligned themselves with Bedouin clans and extremist elements. What followed was not a stabilization effort, but a coordinated and systematic campaign of violence against the civilian population of Suwayda, which is predominantly composed of Druze religious minorities.

Since the early hours of July 14, 2025, the city of Suwayda was subjected to a large-scale incursion of military troops, that constituted a coordinated campaign of sectarian violence targeting the Druze and Christian communities. While initial public statements framed the events as retaliatory clashes involving Bedouin groups and extremist factions, verifiable evidence of survivor testimonies and available video recordings indicates that the violence was premeditated and strategically orchestrated with the intent to forcibly displace and eliminate Druze civilians from the region.

Patterns of Coordinated Acts and Lines of Command

As in the March massacres of the Coastal areas, the attacks against civilians of religious minorities in Suwayda involved a concerted coordination of actors operating side by side. According to available eyewitness accounts, these include coordinated acts of General Security forces under the Syrian Ministry of Defense, regular Syrian military units, including armored and artillery support, armed Bedouin factions mobilized from multiple governorates, and militia groups, including extremist cells with known affiliations to transnational terrorist networks.

These forces which were almost indistinguishable through their camouflage executed synchronized assaults on Druze neighborhoods, combining ground incursions, targeted killings, destruction of property, and psychological terror. The operation was marked by explicit declarations of intent, deliberate targeting of civilians, and use of siege tactics. Perpetrators recorded themselves announcing their goal to "cleanse" Druze populations, invoking sectarian and ethnic hatred. Entire families were executed, homes were looted and destroyed, and places of worship were desecrated. Communities were encircled, shelled, and cut off from humanitarian aid, exacerbating civilian suffering.

The involvement of state-affiliated forces and the systematic nature of the attacks raise again concerns regarding responsibility and institutional complicity in a line of command. Recurrent and persistent patterns of these incidents as documented through eyewitness accounts and visual evidence warrant comprehensive investigation by international accountability mechanisms and underscore the urgent need for protective measures for vulnerable communities in Syria. Documented and verified instances include the following areas of concern that require immediate attention and further investigation.

Summary Executions of Civilians

General Security forces, operating under the Syrian Ministry of Defense, conducted repeated and coordinated incursions into densely populated residential zones across Suwayda province during July 2025. These operations were marked by violent forced entry, indiscriminate use of firepower, and the deployment of armored units and heavy weaponry in civilian neighborhoods. Eyewitness accounts and geospatial analysis confirm that these raids occurred in areas devoid of armed opposition, with no active hostilities or military installations present.

Multiple verified accounts—including survivor testimonies, forensic documentation, and visual evidence—confirm that entire families were executed inside their homes by armed personnel affiliated with General Security forces. These killings were carried out summarily, without any form of judicial process or legal justification. In most cases, there was no indication of armed resistance or provocation from the victims, many of whom were elderly, disabled, or children. The deliberate targeting of unarmed civilians in domestic settings reflects a calculated strategy of extermination and collective punishment.

The nature of these executions—carried out with survivors forced to witness the killing of relatives—underscores the psychological terror and intent to destroy family units. In several documented cases, children were shot at point-blank range, and women were killed while attempting to shield their loved ones. These acts were systematic and executed with clear intent to eliminate civilian presence.

Raids on Civilian Areas Without Military Necessity

Verified documentation—including survivor testimonies, photographic evidence, and field reports—reveals a consistent pattern of predatory behavior by General Security forces and affiliated armed groups during operations in Suwayda province. Civilians were subjected to a range of abuses that combined physical violence, psychological degradation, and material exploitation.

These actions included verbal degradation, with slurs targeting religious identity, gender, and age, intended to humiliate and intimidate, forced entry into homes, often by breaking down doors with weapons or explosives, physical assaults, including beatings with rifle butts, kicking, and use of blunt instruments, and extortion and looting, involving the confiscation of valuables, destruction of personal property, and systematic theft of food, livestock, and household goods.

The absence of any discernible military objective suggests that these operations were not conducted in pursuit of legitimate security enforcement, but rather as a strategy of intimidation, collective punishment, and demographic control. Civilians—many of them elderly, disabled, or children—were subjected to arbitrary violence, destruction of property, and psychological terror. In several documented cases, homes were shelled without warning, families were forcibly removed or executed, and survivors were denied access to medical care and humanitarian assistance. The pattern of these raids, their geographic spread, and the consistency of tactics employed across multiple locations indicate a coordinated policy rather than isolated misconduct.

Medical Siege and Attacks on Healthcare Infrastructure

During the July 2025 campaign in Suwayda province, hospitals and medical facilities were systematically targeted by General Security forces and affiliated armed groups. These attacks were not isolated incidents but part of a broader strategy to cripple civilian resilience and obstruct life-saving care. Multiple hospitals were surrounded, shelled, and stripped of medical equipment, rendering them non-operational and exposing patients and staff to extreme danger.

Medical personnel—including doctors, nurses, and paramedics—were either killed during shelling or trapped inside facilities without access to evacuation routes or external humanitarian aid. In several documented cases, wounded civilians were denied entry to hospitals or forcibly removed from treatment areas. Survivors report that patients were left to die untreated, and credible accounts indicate that some were executed within hospital premises, including in operating rooms and triage wards.

Multiple incidents involved the deliberate obstruction of humanitarian assistance. Medical personnel were blocked from reaching the wounded, with ambulances turned away or fired upon. Survivors were denied access to basic care, including first aid, water, and shelter. In some cases, injured civilians were left to die in front of their families, despite the presence of nearby medical resources

Abductions, Detention, and Degrading Treatment of Civilians

According to the latest verified updates, approximately 103 women and children and over 500 unarmed men have been abducted in Suwayda province during the July 2025 campaign. These

abductions were carried out primarily by General Security forces, operating under the Syrian Ministry of Defense, and were executed without legal warrants, judicial oversight, or any semblance of due process. The victims were civilians, many of whom were targeted based on their religious identity or perceived community affiliation.

Detained individuals were held in a network of clandestine facilities, including underground prisons, often lacking ventilation, sanitation, or access to daylight and former-regime military barracks, repurposed as detention centers and known for prior use in torture and extrajudicial confinement. Survivor testimonies and corroborated reports describe a consistent pattern of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment.

These include methods of psychological terror through verbal humiliation, including sectarian slurs and forced degradation rituals, death threats, and mock executions. Physical harm includes denial of medical treatment, even in cases of visible injury, chronic illness, or trauma, plucking of moustaches from Druze religious men—a symbolic act of humiliation targeting a visible marker of religious status and communal respect, severe physical beatings, often administered with blunt instruments, rifle butts, and electrical cables, and extrajudicial executions, with bodies reportedly disposed of in unmarked graves or left in remote areas.

Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in the Druze Community

The Druze community in Suwayda province upholds cultural values and norms surrounding matters of modesty, honor, and family reputation. Within this context, sexual violence—particularly rape—is stigmatized and rarely disclosed publicly. Survivors face intense societal pressure, fear of ostracization, and internalized shame, which severely impedes documentation and reporting. These cultural dynamics have posed significant challenges to efforts to verify and record instances of sexual violence, despite its widespread and devastating impact. Credible information was given by medical professionals operating in the region, indicating that at least 115 women and girls were subjected to rape during the July 2025 campaign, 79 of them are reportedly pregnant. These estimates are based on clinical observations, survivor disclosures made in confidence, and patterns of injury consistent with sexual assault.

One incident involved a raid by Syrian Defense Forces on a residential building. Witnesses report that women were forcibly separated from men, shot in the legs to immobilize them, and then raped. The perpetrators left the victims to bleed to death, denying them medical attention and deliberately prolonging their suffering. This act reflects not only sexual violence but also intentional infliction of pain and humiliation, constituting torture and extrajudicial execution. In another case, a girl was reportedly raped in front of her parents and family.

Further corroboration comes from a classified report by a local hospital in Suwayda, which documented the arrival of three underage girls following gang rape by multiple men. Medical examinations confirmed the presence of sexually transmitted diseases, underscoring the brutality and medical neglect involved. These cases reflect a complete disregard for the physical and psychological integrity of children and violate the most fundamental norms of human dignity.

Targeted Abuse and Persecution of Druze Civilians

Documented evidence—including eyewitness accounts, visual recordings, and forensic assessments—indicates that Druze civilians were subjected to deliberate and targeted abuse based on their religious identity. This abuse included verbal slurs, threats invoking sectarian hatred, and the desecration of sacred sites central to Druze religious life. The language used by perpetrators frequently referenced the victims' faith in derogatory and dehumanizing terms, underscoring the discriminatory intent behind the attacks.

Particularly egregious was the targeting of older religious men, including community elders and spiritual leaders. These individuals were publicly harassed, beaten, and insulted. In multiple cases, their moustaches were forcibly shaved—an act that carries deep symbolic weight in Druze culture, where facial hair is associated with dignity, wisdom, and religious authority. The forced shaving was not incidental but intended to humiliate, degrade, and strip these men of their communal status and spiritual identity.

Eyewitness accounts and visual evidence indicate that places of worship—including prayer houses, sanctuaries (Mazar), and shrines—were systematically vandalized, looted, burned, and in some cases, razed entirely. These sites hold profound religious, historical, and cultural significance for the Druze community and are protected under international humanitarian law as civilian objects and cultural property. Their destruction reflects not only material loss but an assault on the community's spiritual heritage and collective identity.

Targeting of Christian Communities in Suwayda Province

Suwayda province is home to an estimated 24,000 Christians, who have historically coexisted with the Druze majority in a context of relative intercommunal stability. However, recent attacks in July 2025 disrupted this fragile coexistence, resulting in significant harm to Christian civilians and the destruction of religious and cultural property.

According to an interview conducted with Father Tony al Butrus of Saint Philip's Catholic Church in Shahba and supported by a subsequent official letter, approximately 70 Christian homes were burned, looted, or otherwise destroyed during the coordinated assaults. In addition, six churches, including historic and active places of worship, were deliberately targeted and set ablaze. These attacks were not incidental; they reflect a pattern of religiously motivated violence and cultural erasure.

Eyewitness testimony, supported by video documentation, confirms the burning of a church, a site of spiritual and communal significance. The footage shows extensive fire damage, desecration of religious symbols, and structural collapse consistent with deliberate arson. Survivors report that attackers used sectarian slurs and threatened further violence against Christian residents, reinforcing the discriminatory intent behind the assaults.

The targeting of Christian civilians and places of worship alongside attacks on Druze communities suggests a broader campaign of sectarian cleansing. The destruction of religious infrastructure not only violates legal norms but also inflicts lasting harm on the cultural and spiritual fabric of affected communities.

Prolonged Sieges and Civilian Harassment

Survivors across Suwayda province report enduring sustained and deliberate siege conditions imposed by General Security forces and affiliated armed groups. These incursions were characterized by prolonged shelling of residential areas, enforced isolation, and repeated threats of renewed violence. Communities were encircled and systematically cut off from essential resources, including food, potable water, electricity, medical supplies, and communication networks.

The siege tactics employed were not incidental to broader military operations but appear to have been strategically designed to terrorize, weaken, and forcibly displace the civilian population. In several documented cases, humanitarian convoys were blocked, medical personnel were denied access, and wounded civilians were left untreated. Agricultural lands were destroyed, livestock was stolen or killed, and water sources were deliberately contaminated or buried—rendering entire villages uninhabitable and accelerating mass displacement.

Forced Displacement and Systematic Destruction of Property

The destruction was comprehensive, targeted, and methodical. Residential homes were looted, set ablaze, and razed to the ground, eliminating shelter and erasing generational property holdings. Water infrastructure, including wells and cisterns, was buried or contaminated, cutting off access to potable water and undermining the viability of return. Electricity grids were dismantled or disabled, plunging entire areas into darkness and severing communication. Agricultural assets, including farms, orchards, and grazing lands, were demolished; trees were uprooted or burned, and livestock, including cattle, were stolen or slaughtered.

A total of 34 villages in Suwayda province were forcibly evacuated during the July 2025 campaign. The evacuations were not the result of spontaneous flight or generalized conflict, but rather the outcome of deliberate and coordinated actions designed to render these communities permanently uninhabitable. These actions reflect a clear intent to depopulate. The scale and precision of destruction suggest not incidental damage, but a strategic effort to eliminate the material foundations of civilian life and prevent the reestablishment of affected communities.

Psychological Harm to Vulnerable Populations

The documented operations in Suwayda province inflicted severe psychological trauma on civilian populations, with women and children disproportionately affected. Survivors recount harrowing experiences of witnessing the execution of family members, enduring verbal threats, and seeing their homes destroyed. These events occurred in proximity, often within confined domestic spaces, amplifying the emotional and psychological impact.

According to available reports, children reportedly exhibit symptoms consistent with acute psychological distress and post-traumatic stress disorder, including but not limited to night terrors and sleep disturbances, dissociation and emotional withdrawal, regressive behaviors and loss of speech, and persistent fear, hypervigilance, and anxiety. Similarly, women survivors reportedly show signs of chronic psychological suffering, including depression, panic attacks, and feelings of helplessness and shame—often compounded by the loss of children, spouses, and community

support structures. In many cases, the trauma was exacerbated by the deliberate humiliation inflicted during raids, including verbal degradation and threats of sexual violence. The deliberate infliction of mental harm on protected persons, especially minors, constitutes cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment.

The violations reviewed in this report occurred within a broader and sustained pattern of persecution targeting religious minorities in the Syrian Arab Republic—in this case the Druze and Christian communities. This persecution is facilitated by entrenched institutional and logistical support and governmental impunity wherein camouflaged state-affiliated actors operate without fear of investigation, prosecution, or oversight. The absence of independent accountability mechanisms, judicial remedies, or protective frameworks to protect civilians has enabled the repeated targeting of non-combatant populations in violation of binding international legal norms.

Legal Considerations

Under the established framework of international humanitarian law, the deliberate targeting of civilians, summary executions, and attacks on protected religious sites constitute grave human rights violations. Simultaneously, the documented conduct reflects violations of the right to life, freedom from torture and cruel treatment, and protection against discrimination based on religion or ethnicity. The principle of distinction—requiring parties to a conflict to differentiate between combatants and civilians—has been systematically violated. The use of siege tactics, denial of medical care, and destruction of civilian property and infrastructure further contravene the obligations of humane treatment and proportionality.

The involvement of official State forces in these operations—under the guise of conflict mitigation—raises serious concerns and an alarming lack of accountability. The deployment of security units in support of sectarian violence constitutes a breach of the State's obligations under the international humanitarian law, including the duty to protect civilians and refrain from collective punishment, international human rights law, particularly the prohibition of discrimination, arbitrary violence, and persecution based on religious identity, and customary international law, which prohibits the use of force against non-combatants and mandates accountability for State-sponsored atrocities.

In addition, the scale, coordination, and ideological framing of violence meet the threshold for ethnic cleansing as defined in international jurisprudence, and may constitute crimes against humanity (under Article 7 of the Rome Statute, including persecution, extermination, and forcible transfer), war crimes (under Article 8, including attacks on civilian populations and destruction of protected religious sites) and violations of international law (including the prohibition of collective punishment and targeting based on religious identity).

Conclusion

Taken together, these acts represent grave breaches of international humanitarian law and core human rights instruments. The systematic nature of the violations, the targeting of protected groups, and the absence of lawful justification demand urgent international investigation and accountability. These violations are no isolated incidents. They indicate a deliberate and sustained

pattern of conduct that may trigger international criminal liability and require immediate investigation by competent bodies.

Hence, the events of July 2025 in Suwayda reflect a failure of governance but a deliberate misuse of State apparatus to facilitate ethnic and religious persecution. These actions may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity and warrant urgent investigation by international accountability mechanisms of the United Nations, including the Commission of Inquiry, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Human Rights Council, and relevant Special Rapporteurs.

Given the gravity and scale of these violations, the current situation warrants urgent referral to competent international legal bodies, and the International Criminal Court. It also calls for immediate protective measures, independent investigations, and coordinated international responses to prevent further harm and ensure accountability.